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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: BEN ALI'S "YOUTH PACT" MORE ABOUT BEN ALI THAN  
YOUTH

REF: TUNIS 769

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) The GOT's youth initiative (reftel) culminated with the November 7th signing of a "Pact with Tunisian Youth." The agreement is the result of a year long "Dialogue with Youth" sponsored by the government. Though members of government and civil society have at other times dwelt on the issues of unemployment and disenfranchisement among young people, the Pact focused on how beneficial President Ben Ali has been for Tunisia and how young people should do more for their country, rather than addressing concrete challenges and solutions. End Summary.

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Dialogue Is Good...  
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¶2. (C) After a year of youth forums and a website ([www.pactjeunesse.tn](http://www.pactjeunesse.tn)) devoted to a dialogue with youth, the GOT announced the final product would be a "Pact with Tunisian Youth" to be signed on November 7, the anniversary of President Ben Ali's rise to power. The agreement was signed by young people representing various political parties, members of domestic organizations and NGOs, and young expatriate Tunisians. The final product, however, spoke little of the challenges facing Tunisian youth and focused instead on how much the GOT has done for young people and how young Tunisians should do more to improve their country's image and economic prospects. This attitude is exemplified by the movement's motto "Tunisia First." The Youth Pact discusses, at length, the meaning of "Tunisia First" namely, "to elevate its (Tunisia's) status among the world's nations so that it remains glorious and invulnerable forever".

¶3. (C) The Youth Pact goes on to thank the "Man of the Change (President Ben Ali) who planted the seeds of hope, stimulated the forces of action and devotion, and revived our people's sense of ambition, which has restored confidence and made possible the accomplishment of remarkable gains, achievements and successes." After several paragraphs devoted to the president, the document identifies rule of law, freedom, human rights, justice, and women's rights as the foundations of Tunisia. The end of the pact contains a commitment to "accomplish our duties vis-a-vis Tunisia and its people...through a larger involvement in political and civil action, and a greater contribution to the noble effort of volunteering and solidarity."

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...But Action Would be Better

14. (C) At other times during the course of the past year's youth dialogue, members of civil society and President Ben Ali himself have spoken of high unemployment rates and apathy among young people as two of Tunisian society's great challenges. The Pact did not identify specific problems; neither did it contain proposals or a framework in which to address issues facing Tunisian youth. Though the dialogue with youth was billed as the primary means of addressing young people's concerns, at this point concrete proposals addressing issues such as unemployment have come through other channels (such as the President's November 7 speech, see septel). It is unclear from the Pact itself if the topics raised during fora and online were incorporated into the Pact.

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Comment  
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15. (C) Unemployment and apathy are two of the main factors leading Tunisian youth to leave the country in increasing numbers (reftel). The Pact could have been used as a vehicle to engage youth and make them feel relevant to the decision making process. Instead, it was turned into more propaganda for Ben Ali. In addition, given the difficulty encountered by non-GOT supported NGOs and associations registering or holding meetings, the unspoken subtext to the Pact is that youth are free to volunteer, so long as they do so in a way the GOT approves. Plainly, the GOT believes the youth pact exercise (and others similar to it) builds support for Ben

Ali and the government. However, at least one interlocutor, a young legal professor, called the pact "kalam fadi," or empty words. We expect most youth have the same reaction. If the GOT truly wishes to engage and foster a new generation of political and economic leaders, it's going to have to do better than the Pact with Tunisian Youth. End Comment.  
GODEC